

## Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 252864

FOLLOWING REPEAT CALCUTTA 2497 SENT SECSTATE INFO NEW DELHI  
DATED OCT 21.

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CALCUTTA 2497

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, VN

SUBJ: SITUATION IN SAIGON AS OF AUGUST 20, 1975

1. FR. IAN TRAVERS-BALL, MISSIONARY OF CHARITY AND AN AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL, CALLED ON CONSOFF TO APPLY FOR NONIMMIGRANT VISA. FATHER BALL DEPARTED SAIGON AUGUST 20 AT THE REQUEST OF NORTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES IN SAIGON. CONSOFF WHO HAD SERVED IN VIETNAM 1963-67 AND TDY 1968 TOOK OCCASION TO INQUIRE REGARDING MUTUAL FRIENDS. THIS RESULTED IN AN EXTENDED CONVERSATION WHICH IS REPORTED BELOW, FOR WHATEVER USE IT MIGHT BE TO THE DEPARTMENT AND WITH THE HOPE THAT IT IS NOT COMPLETELY REDUNDANT.

2. PLEASE PROTECT FATHER TRAVERS-BALL'S NAME AND NATIONALITY AS THE SOURCE OF THIS INFORMATION.

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3. CATHOLIC CHURCH: THE CHURCHES ARE OPEN AND SERVICES ARE BEING

HELD AND WELL ATTENDED. THE GOVERNMENT HAS CLOSED DOWN ALMOST ALL CATHOLIC SCHOOLS. ONE OF THE EXCEPTIONS IS THE SEMINARY IN DALAT. ALL CATHOLIC TEACHERS, LAY AND RELIGIOUS, ARE BEING SENT FOR RE-EDUCATION ALONG WITH TEACHERS FROM OTHER SCHOOLS. THE RE-EDUCATION COURSE CAN BE AS SHORT AS THREE DAYS OR FOR AN INDEFINITE PERIOD. ONE INCIDENT WHICH HAS CAUSED SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SOUTH VIETNAM GRAVE CONCERN HAS BEEN THE ARREST OF BISHOP NUGYEN VAN THUAN. IT APPEARS THAT SHORTLY AFTER THE FALL OF SAIGON, BISHOP THUAN, A NEPHEW OF FORMER PRESIDENT NGO DINH DIEM, WAS TRANSFERRED FROM NHA TRANG TO SAIGON TO TAKE UP THE POST OF CO-ADJUTOR TO THE BISHOP OF SAIGON. (BY CHURCH LAW THIS WOULD HAVE GIVEN BISHOP THUAN THE RIGHT OF SUCCESSION AS BISHOP OF SAIGON.) GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES TWICE ORDERED HIM TO RETURN TO NHA TRANG; HE REFUSED STATING HE WAS ACTING UNDER CHURCH ORDERS. IN EARLY AUGUST THE BISHOP OF SAIGON AND BISHOP THUAN WERE CALLED TO THE OLD PRESIDENTIAL PALACE TO EXPLAIN THEIR ACTIONS. AFTER A HEATED INTERVIEW, THE BISHOP OF SAIGON WAS INFORMED BY AN OFFICIAL, UNNAMED, THAT BISHOP THUAN WAS BEING TAKEN TO NHA TRANG. HE WAS UPON HIS ARRIVAL PLACED UNDER HOUSE ARREST. AS FAR AS THE CHURCH IS CONCERNED THE CO-ADJUTOR OF SAIGON IS BISHOP NUGYEN VAN THUAN AND HIS POSITION WILL NOT BE FILLED. (ALSO UNDER HOUSE ARREST IS FATHER THANH (FNU), FORMER HEAD OF THE ANTI-CORRUPTION MOVEMENT AND ENEMY OF FORMER PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU. THE REASON FOR HIS ARREST IS NOT RPT NOT KNOWN.)

4. FATHER BALL SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S SUPPORT OF "PROGRESSIVE PRIESTS" AND THE WEEKLY PAPER THAT THEY ARE PRINTING IS MORE IMPORTANT AND PERHAPS MORE DANGEROUS TO THE CHURCH. THIS PAPER, HE SAID, IS SOWING CONFUSION AMONG THE CATHOLIC ELITE AS TO WHAT THE CHURCH'S ATTITUDE IS TOWARDS THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT. THE CHURCH, HE CONTINUED, WOULD LIKE MUTUAL NONINVOLVEMENT BUT THEY FEAR THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL INVOLVE ITSLEF IN THEIR AFFAIRS AND THEY (RELIGIOUS LEADERS) ARE UNSURE HOW TO RESPOND.

5. BUDDHISTS: THE NUMBER OF BUDDHIST MONKS ABOUT SAIGON HAS VISIBLY DECLINED AS HAS THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE GOING TO THE PAGODAS. HE CAN MAKE NO JUDGMENT AS TO WHY THERE ARE SO FEW PEOPLE AT THE PAGODAS BUT NOTES THAT ALL BOOKSTORES AND SCHOOLS ATTACHED TO THE PAGODAS HAVE BEEN CLOSED AND THAT THIS MIGHT BE THE REASON. CONFIDENTIAL

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INTER ALIA HE COMMENTED THAT HE HAD HEARD OF NO RPT NO ARRESTS OF ANY PROMINENT BUDDHIST LEADERS.

6. THE GOVERNMENT: THE GOVERNMENT AT ALL DECISIONMAKING LEVELS IS IN THE HAND OF NORTH VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS, CIVILIAN OR MILITARY, WHILE ALL THE CLERICAL POSITIONS ARE FILLED BY SOUTH VIETNAMESE. WHILE PEOPLE ARE CAREFUL IN THEIR COMMENTS, RESENTMENT IS FELT OVER THIS MATTER.

7. PREVIOUS TO FATHER BALL'S DEPARTURE FROM SAIGON, CADRES WERE GOING FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE TELLING PEOPLE THAT THEY SHOULD LEAVE SAIGON AND RETURN TO THEIR VILLAGES BEFORE THEY WERE FORCED OUT. THE AIM, HE SAID, WAS TO REDUCE THE POPULATION OF SAIGON BY TWO-THIRDS. CONSIDERING THE LACK OF SUCCESS THAT THEY ARE NOW HAVING IN CONVINCING PEOPLE TO LEAVE PEACEFULLY, HE EXPECTS THE GOVERNMENT TO FORCE THEM OUT WITH THE SAME BRUTALITY THAT THEY USED IN CLEANING UP CRIME IN SAIGON. HE NOTES THAT SINCE THE END OF JULY CRIME IS VIRTUALLY NON-EXISTENT IN VIETNAM.

8. NONE OF THE MILITARY OFFICER WHO HAVE BEEN TAKEN AWAY FOR RE-EDUCATION HAVE RETURNED. SOME HAVE BEEN HEARD FROM BUT THE NUMBER WHO HAVE NOT RPT NOT BEEN HEARD FROM IS CAUSING GREAT FEAR AMONG THEIR FAMILIES AS TO THEIR ULTIMATE FATE. HE HAS NO DEFINITIVE INFORMATION AS TO WHERE THEY ARE OR WHAT IS OR HAS HAPPENED TO THEM.

9. NORTH VIETNAM TROOPS WHO ARE STATIONED IN SAIGON CONTINUED TO BE WELL DISCIPLINED. TMDY HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN NO RPT NO INCIDENTS WITH THE POPULATION. FRATERNIZATION APPEARS TO BE DISCOURAGED AND THE NVA STILL APPEAR TO BE UNCORRUPTED BY SAIGON MANNERS OR MODES THOUGH THEY ARE BECOMING A TRIFLE MORE SOPHISTICATED IN PROTECTING THEIR POSSESSIONS.

10. RESISTANCE TO THE GOVERNMENT: FATHER BALL SAID THAT HE KNOWS OF FIGHTING IN AND AROUND THE DELTA AS LATE AS AUGUST. HE SPECIFICALLY RELATED CAN THO, MY THO, LONG KHANH, AND, IN JULY, AROUND BIEN HOA. THE RESISTANCE WAS PRIMARILY FROM THE RESNAIOUS SECTS (CAO DAI AND HOA HOA) WITH SOME CATHOLIC INVOLVEMENT. HE MADE IT VERY

CLEAR THAT THESE WERE ISOLATED INCIDENTS WITH NO RPT NO CENTRALIZED LEADERSHIP AND THAT REPORTS OF THIS TYPE OF ACTIVITY  
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HAD DECREASED AS THE TIME AFTER THE FALL OF SAIGON LENGTHENED AND THE GOVERNMENT EXTENDED ITS CONTROL FURTHER AND FURTHER INTO THE HINTERLAND.

11. HE MENTIONED THAT ON HIS FLIGHT FROM SAIGON HE WAS ACCOMPANIED BY AN ITALIAN WITH HIS MONTAGNARD FAMILY WHO SAID THAT THE MONTAGNARDS WERE STILL FIGHTING ISOLATED ACTIONS AGAINST THE NVA IN THE KONTUM PLEIKU AREA WITH HEAVY CASUALTIES ON BOTH SIDES AS LATE AS THE FIRST WEEK IN AUGUST. THE ITALIAN MENTIONED THAT THE MONTANGARDS WERE BEING RESETTLED BY THE NVA AND THAT FAMILIES WERE BEING BROKEN UP. FATHER BALL SAID THAT WHILE HE HAD NO WAY TO VERIFY THE STORY HE HAD ALSO HEARD SIMILAR RUMORS OF MONTANGARD FIGHTING PREVIOUS TO HIS DEPARTURE FOR SAIGON.

12. ECONOMY: PLENTY OF FOOD IS AVAILABLE IN THE MARKET BUT THERE

IS LITTLE OR NO MONEY WITH WHICH TO BUY IT. UNEMPLOYMENT IS VERY HIGH, ESPECIALLY AMONG EX-GVN OFFICIALS OR WHO HAVE WORKED FOR THE USG OR US CONTRACTORS. THE GOVERNMENT, ACCORDING TO FATHER BALL, EITHER IS UNINTERESTED IN THE PROBLEM OR IS INCAPABLE OF SOLVING IT. HE WONDERED IF THE AUTHORITIES WERE NOT RPT NOT TRYING TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT THAT THIS MIGHT BE ONE WAY TO HAVE THE PEOPLE LEAVE SAIGON.

13. ATMOSPHERICS: THE POPULATION IS CONSTANTLY FRIGHTENED BY RUMORS AND LIVES IN CONSTANT FEAR AND APPREHENSION. THEY ARE RELUCTANT TO SPEAK WITH STRANGERS, VIETNAMESE OR FOREIGNERS, AND WHEN THEY DO THEY ARE CIRCUMSPECT IN WHAT THEY SAY. FATHER BALL SAID THAT SAIGON HAD SO CHANGED THAT ONE COULD NOT NOW RECOGNIZE THE POPULATION AS BEING SAIGONESE.

LIEBOWITZ

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